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## Salt-Raised Runt

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# Salt-Raised Runt

“Are you dating him?”

The lights in the bathroom were dimmer than they ought to be and May thought it made the smell worse. Beckett said it was because bright places were clean, like hospitals, and he would know because he was the oldest of five with a sixth on the way. May thought it was because there was less to really look at. Nothing to distract you from the smell.

“So, are you dating him?” Hailey asked again, pushing a finger against May’s chest. May turned her face away, looking at the stained-glass window, which cast a murky yellow-green tint over everything. One of the sinks was running. It’d been running for a week, and all the sophomore girls were taking bets on how long it would be until it got fixed.

Hailey’s blonde hair was frizzy and straw-dry, and her lips glimmered with moisture. She sneered and May sneered back. *Uppity*, she thought. *Dumbshit*.

“Who?” she asked.

“Beckett. What’re you, dumb?” Hailey asked loudly, turning slightly to smile at the girls surrounding her. They looked more like bored spectators than companions, leaning lazily against a stall’s pillar and popping gum between their teeth.

“No,” May said. “Why, you wanna fuck him?” One of the girls behind Hailey choked with laughter. Her friend frowned at her and Hailey ignored the commotion. Laughing at cuss words was childish.

“He’s different than the rest of these losers,” Hailey said, moving to sit on the edge of the sink next to May. “He’s always so serious about God or whatever, it’s cute. I wanna see if it’s all talk.”

In middle school, Hailey had started a rumor that Beckett was inbred. He’d had a crush on her even after that. May didn’t understand boys. Girls could do the most horrible things in the world to them and they’d think it

was cute. If someone ever started a rumor about her, she'd punch them in the nose.

"You know it's not. He was a choir boy until his voice broke," May pointed out, letting water from the broken faucet run through her fingers. It was cold, but she forced herself not to flinch.

"I should have known you weren't dating, sorry for going all headbitch on you," Hailey said, leaning into the word *bitch* and casting a glance at her friends, who remained silently unamused. Her voice rose an octave. "It's kinda weird that he's always hanging out with you, but I should've known it wasn't like that because he doesn't seem like the type to go for black girls."

May clenched her jaw. "You don't know shit," she said, scratching at a scab on her elbow. She didn't know why she couldn't punch Hailey in the nose. She never felt angry while it was happening; she just felt small and embarrassed and ugly in a way that humans could never be. The anger came after, when she thought about it in bed or walking home or in the bathtub, fighting to keep her eyes from watering. *You're not weak. If you cry, you're weak. They want you to cry, dumbshit.*

"Je-sus, no offense," Hailey said, pulling a tube of gloss from her pocket and applying it to her still-shining lips. "I just mean you can tell, you know? Black guys date a ton of white girls but white guys don't date black girls unless they're really into that kinda thing or it's like a fairy-tale love love situation."

She paused to look around the room. May's fingers had curled into a fist and she watched the water try to run through the tight circle. There was a loud pop of gum. One of the girls snickered, watching May.

Hailey scoffed. "I'm just *saying*, you don't have to get all mad—"

"Whatever," May said, pushing past the other girls and making her way out the door.

The evening sun fell heavily through the windows of Bell Hood High as May's shoes echoed on the well-waxed linoleum. She liked being in school after hours. It gave her a break from her cramped shotgun house and her family, all loaded into it like bullets. A run-in with Hailey was worth the space.

She walked outside to the gated playground that no one used for anything but lounging or idly pushing themselves on the swings, trying to look like they weren't having fun. Beckett was sitting on one, twirling himself in a lazy circle with his heels dug into the tar floor. He had a serious expression, as always, face turning red in the sun. May pointed it out when she reached him and he scowled.

"Why do we have to wait outside? It's cooler indoors," he complained, handing her a mini bag of pretzels he'd gotten from the lunch lady earlier. She always gave him extra snacks. May thought it was because he looked greyhoundthin and Beckett thought it was because his family was poor, which he resented.

“My father doesn’t believe in handouts,” he’d say, looking very noble as he said it.

“Cause they’d ask us what activity we were a part of and you can’t lie for shit,” May said, sitting on the swing next to him and lifting her legs up so she was balancing on the seat.

“I can, just not to grown-ups!” Beckett insisted, trying to kick her legs before realizing that she’d folded them up. She grinned at him and he flipped her the bird.

“Don’t say grown-ups, it makes you sound like a baby,” May said.

“Don’t tell me what to say,” Beckett said, voice softened by the heat. May was glad for the cloth of her dress; whenever she leaned too far to one side, the swing’s chain touched bare skin and burned her.

“Hailey jumped me in the bathroom today,” May said, tossing a pretzel at Beckett’s head. It bounced off his nose and fell to the ground, where he crushed it under his heel. They both watched this process with idle interest.

“Hailey Whitfield? Why?”

“She wants to pop your cherry,” May said, hoping the crassness of the statement might fluster him.

Beckett shook his head. “That’s a girl thing,” he asserted.

“What is?” May asked, screwing up her face. She was starting to sweat already and Beckett’s thin black hair was sticking to his forehead.

“...Cherries,” he said, chewing over the word. “They taught us in Sunday school. You can tell if a girl’s done it because it’s all red inside instead of pink or white.”

He paused, eyes widening as he caught up to what May had told him. “Hailey wants to do it?” he asked, face becoming even redder. May shrugged.

Beckett frowned. “Well, did she say she wanted to or not?”

May shrugged again. “I’ll tell you if you twist me up.”

Beckett hesitated for a long moment before standing up and spinning May around by the chains of her swing until she couldn’t do a full turn. Then he let go, jumping back as her limbs flew out and around and she screamed with the joy of it all.

“Now who’s the baby?” he asked, going back to his swing and waiting for her to slow down. When she was still and relishing in her dizziness, he asked about Hailey and the bathroom again.

“She said you weren’t like the other guys in our grade and she wanted to know if you were actually a virgin or not,” May said, sliding off the swing and sitting on the ground instead. It was even hotter there, but she needed the world to stop spinning.

“What did you say?” Beckett asked nervously, tracing the cross hidden under his shirt like an auntie who’d just heard bad news.

“I said you were the biggest virgin in the world and that you’ve had a crush on her since she was born. I said you’d probably jerk it to a lock of her ratty-ass hair if she gave you one,” May loudly proclaimed. Beckett kicked her side and she shrieked, rolling away.

“That’s *not* funny, May,” he hissed.

“*Whatever*, I was *joking!*” she shouted.

They glared at one another until a bird cried overhead. Then Beckett began to turn himself in circles again and May got back on her swing, using it to climb onto the swingset itself. Beckett watched her and then looked away.

“You shouldn’t climb in a dress,” he said.

“Why? It’s only you here,” she said, then kicked his chain. He didn’t respond except to start slowly swaying back and forth as a companionable silence fell over them.

May thought about Beckett. They’d been friends since she could remember: the Jesus freak and the only Black kid that didn’t huddle with her own kind. Why was he suddenly cute and not her? Her anger at Hailey welled up and she felt her eyes begin to sting, but she looked up at the sun until she imagined them all drying up.

Beckett had one Black half brother, Louis, who’d avoided her for months until one day she cornered him in his room and asked what his problem with her was.

“I don’t want to be seen hanging out with you.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re Black.”

“You’re Black too!” she’d pointed out.

He’d scoffed. “Yeah, but I’m not Black-Black.”

May thought about how she was Black-Black as she jumped off the swing set and rolled all the way to the fence that sectioned off the area from the rest of the playground. Beckett yelped and rushed to her, thinking she’d fallen, but when he reached her she popped up and stared at him with such intensity that it rendered him breathless for a moment.

“Do you wanna go out?” she asked in his silence. Beckett stared back at her. She was sweating and the scab on her elbow had started to bleed again because of the fall. He didn’t seem to know what to say, so he focused on the spot of red slowly trailing down her arm.

“Sure,” he said. Then, “Yes.”

May nodded, standing as Beckett walked over to her swing and picked up the pretzels that she’d left on the ground, handing them to her again.

“Salt helps clot blood,” he said, not knowing if it did. May took the bag, shoving pretzel after pretzel in her mouth until the entire bag was finished.

“If Hailey asks you to go somewhere with her, you’re going to say no, right?” she asked, crumpling the bag and letting the jagged edges press into the skin of her palm.

Beckett sniffed, rolling his eyes. “Of course I’m going to say no.”

“When you say no, tell her why, ok? Tell her I’m your girlfriend,” May insisted. Her throat was dry, but she felt like she was buzzing, the heat suddenly energizing her. “Tell her *I’m* your girlfriend.”

It was early afternoon, a time of peak activity at the Reid house. The television was on, though no one was really watching it, and May’s little brother was running up and down the hall, screaming with joy as their dog nipped at his heels. May’s mother’s secondhand radio was playing a Little Richard song as her grandmother, used to the noise, napped in an old rocking chair.

“Mama, I’m going to be late!” May whined, trying to wriggle away from her mother and her hair straightener. Her mother pulled her back between her legs.

“It’s your first date, you need to look good!” her mother scolded before grinning again. “Oh, your first date! My baby...” she cooed, kissing her cheek. May groaned theatrically. Her grandmother snored.

It wasn’t *really* her and Beckett’s first date. Their first date had been going to the candy store after school and their second had been going to a diner over the weekend where Beckett insisted on paying even though May knew he couldn’t afford much. She’d had fries and he’d watched her eat. Both outings had been deathly silent except for the occasional bland compliment: *I like your dress. Is that a new shirt?* May was beginning to worry that Hailey had been right, that Beckett didn’t go for Black girls and she was just forcing him. Whenever she tried to be sweet to him he got a pained look on his face and when he noticed her noticing he’d try to smile and it’d look weird on him.

May saw how other boys acted around their girlfriends: like animalfreaks, trying to impress them. They puffed up and strutted around like birds in mating season, but Beckett stood stiffly with his arms crossed or close to his sides, looking at anything that wasn’t her.

They’d come across Hailey during one of their unofficial dates. They’d been sitting on the jungle gym watching pieces of crumpled paper and empty plastic bags blow across the blacktop when Hailey had climbed up the fence and began shouting.

“Wow, I can feel the romance in the air!” she’d jeered, her full face flushed pink.

“Shut it, Hailey!” May shouted back, standing on one of the yellow rungs. Beckett was turned away from both girls and May imagined this lent him a

degree of deniability. Like in gangster movies when everyone closed their eyes so they could claim they “didn’t see nothin’.”

“What? I didn’t even say anything, you’re such a hot head!” Hailey said, balancing on top of the fence. May had told herself that if Hailey set foot inside the playground, she’d maul her. She ran her finger along the Band-Aid on her elbow, forgetting there was no scab to pick at.

“Maybe if you acted a little more civilized, Beckett could stand to look at you. Hi, Beckett!” Hailey shouted, voice turning sweet at the end. Beckett’s spine straightened but he didn’t turn. May looked at his back and wished that he’d at least glance back towards her. *He just doesn’t wanna look at Hailey*, she told herself, leaping from the jungle gym and tearing towards the fence where Hailey was screaming and scrambling down. *It’s got nothing to do with me.*

“Who even uses the word *civilized* outside history class?” May had asked when she got back, grabbing the rungs and letting her body swing. She thought of herself hanging from a tree and Beckett below her, refusing to look up because she was wearing a dress. She snickered at the thought and opened her mouth to tell Beckett before closing it again and swallowing. The back of her throat felt dry, raw.

If she told Beckett, he might sputter and get angry, and then she’d laugh at him and they’d get into an argument that would last for half an hour, the topic changing from one minute to the next. They hadn’t done that since they’d started going out, and she missed it, but Hailey’s words haunted her, poking at something she already knew. She was lucky Beckett was even going out with her. Her with her dark skin and mean laugh and boyish tangled hair that only grew up and out instead of down toward her shoulders. Being with Beckett felt like a prize she was trying desperately not to bring attention to in case someone noticed and took it away.

So she’d just silently swung her body back and forth until Beckett suggested they go home to escape the heat.

Now they were making their first real appearance—not just holding hands at school or milling around town. They were going to a party that one of the lesser football players was having. Hailey had invited Beckett and Beckett had invited her.

May pressed her tongue against her sharpest tooth, feeling the pinprick of pain. The second she’d gotten home she’d asked her mom to do her hair for the party. She couldn’t wait to rub Hailey’s face in it.

“There,” her mother sighed happily, tucking May’s hair behind her ears. May looked at herself in the mirror. She looked weird. Older, maybe. She hadn’t known her hair was so long.

“Thanks, Mama,” she said, kissing her mother’s cheek and whining when she wrapped her in a bear hug, rocking back and forth.

“He’s going to think you’re the prettiest girl at that party,” she hummed. May smiled into the mirror at the girl who looked like her. She seemed nervous. She didn’t look pretty. She tried to imagine Beckett caring about her hair and couldn’t.

By the time she reached the party her hair had gone frizzy in the heat. When she rang the doorbell, an older girl with thick glasses answered.

“Are y’here for Vinny?” she asked.

“Who’s Vinny?” May asked. The girl rolled her eyes as if this were an inside joke between them before showing her to the living room and vanishing upstairs.

May looked around. Vinny’s house was all wood paneling and mirrors, which made the place feel claustrophobic. There was a table full of snacks in the middle of the room, but no drinks, and somewhere a radio was playing a pop song she didn’t know the words to. No one paid any attention to her entrance and she felt stupid for thinking they might. She spotted Beckett in the corner, thumbing the leaf of a potted plant. She walked over to him, instantly stiffening. He did as well, standing suddenly at attention.

“Hi.”

“Hello.”

“...Do you want—”

“You’re—”

“Oh, sorry.”

“No, I just—”

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

They both quieted, basking in their fantastic failure. After a second, May turned to look at him again, forcing a smile.

“You notice anything different about me?” she asked.

Beckett continued playing with the leaf, which he’d pulled from the plant. “...Your hair’s weird.”

“Weird how?” she asked, voice smaller than she wanted it to be. She coughed.

“I don’t know. It looks like Hailey’s,” he pointed out. May stared at him but he wouldn’t meet her eye. She dug her knuckles into her hip bone instead of his.

“I’m going to get some drinks,” she said, walking towards the kitchen. She liked how mature the words sounded. Beckett didn’t respond except for a hum which might have been the air conditioning.

May stood in the kitchen and tried to look like she wasn’t about to cry. *Don’t be a baby*, she thought, finding a half-full jug of punch and pouring two cups. There was a glass of milk in the fridge, chocolate syrup pooling at the bottom. Who drank milk? She was breathing weird. She looked weird. A few



girls glanced at her and moved away. She clenched her jaw. *You're not going to cry, they want you to cry. Don't cry—why do you even care? Idiot. Fucking moron.* Calling herself a fucking moron made her want to cry harder but it also felt good. Like pressing on a bruise. She wanted to call Beckett a fucking moron too, but she didn't want him to break up with her for being a bad girlfriend.

She was not going to cry. She was going to be a good girlfriend. The best one. A milk and sugar girl who only said sweet things, nothing sharp or lacking in her.

Putting a smile back on her face, she made her way back over to Beckett in the corner, freezing when she saw he was already talking to someone.

"You're really funny, you know that?" Hailey laughed.

Beckett stared at her without blinking. "I wasn't being funny."

"Yeah, I know. You're really smart, I was just joking!" Hailey laughed harder, pushing Beckett's arm. Beckett smiled slightly, the way he did when he didn't know what was going on but wanted to look like he did. Hailey's friends laughed—it was unclear at whom.

"Hey, Hailey, back off," May said, getting in her face. Hailey was wearing lipstick instead of lip gloss and May fought the urge to lick her own to make sure they weren't chapped and gross.

"Je-sus, chill out," Hailey said slowly, rolling her eyes and moving closer to Beckett so that their shoulders were touching. Beckett looked between the two and began to tap his fingers against the wall. "Beckett, are you seriously dating her? Like, for real?"

"Yes," Beckett said softly, drawing the word out as if he was unfamiliar with it.

"He said yeah, so beat it," May growled, then tried to calm herself. Hailey's eyes were wild with joy and May wondered if she was drunk.

"He's probably only going out with you because you forced him or something, right?" Hailey said, giggling. She was moving away from Beckett and towards May at a leisurely pace. May took a step back, telling herself she'd throw one of the cups of punch if Hailey tried anything.

"Just because you can only get a guy to go out with you at gunpoint doesn't mean everyone—" May started but Hailey cut her off, voice growing louder. People around them started to turn.

"You're such a bitch, May. You don't even like him. You're just afraid he'll leave your ass when he finds out other girls can do more than just play hide-and-seek or whatever it is you do all day!" Hailey said, so loud that the party went nearly silent, everyone eager to watch a fight.

May stood in front of Hailey and stared. She was drunk and red-faced, frizzy hair bumped up into a sloppy bouffant. Her lipstick was smeared against her teeth and as she spoke, spittle flew from her mouth onto May's cheek. May realized with a start that she would never be as pretty as her, that

Hailey would always win no matter what. Because Hailey had been raised being loved by the whole world, a thoroughbred who'd never seen her own blood, never watched it run and clot and scab. Hailey would always win because Hailey would never be Black.

Embarrassment quickly doused May's anger and she bit her lip, her chest beginning to heave. Hailey noticed it, grinning. The pink smeared along three of her top teeth, making her look carnivorous.

"Why don't you go back to hanging out in bathroom stalls? Maybe you'll find a guy there willing to—" But she didn't get to finish before Beckett's hand shot out and slapped her across the face.

The sharp sound of the impact made the following silence heavy. A few people shrieked and others sucked in breath through their teeth. No one had ever seen a boy hit a girl before.

Hailey's eyes widened and May felt hers open too as she looked down at her own hand, still holding a cup of punch, and wondered if she'd done it. She felt the sting in her own palm. Or was that the cold?

Hailey opened her mouth and closed it again. No one moved. After a second, Beckett startled and curled the offending hand back towards his chest, cradling it.

"I'm sorry," he said, voice shaking. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry—I didn't—I'm—" And then he was gone, racing towards the door, and May threw their drinks in the air and followed him, a commotion kicking up behind her.

They ran through the hall to the foyer and out the door as a wail finally pierced the abandoned scene. They kept running. They ran down the sidewalk of the neighborhood neither of them lived in and the dirt road it gave way to, through the river that separated the rich side of town from the poor side, through the trees that they'd played in all through elementary school, and past the church where their families were praying, the ringing bells signalling the start of service. They ran into the wide expanse of fields and fields and fields where finally Beckett collapsed and May tripped over him, both of them gasping for air like they were drowning.

May stared at the sky. It was an endless expanse of solid blue. No clouds to shield them from the heavy-hot sun. The grass around them pricked her skin but her body felt too solid to move. Her eyelids sagged and closed as her breath began to steady.

"I can't believe you hit Hailey Whitfield," she murmured. Beckett was lying underneath her and their legs tangled together uncomfortably, but neither of them attempted to move. He didn't answer, starting to cry instead.

May felt a familiar anger well up inside her again. Beckett in tears suddenly felt like the most unfair, horrible thing she'd ever seen. Like when her dog had had babies and the runt puppy tried blindly to reach its mother's milk for days before dying. Because hadn't Beckett been a sweet-milk baby too? Why

was she the only one who had to be tough? Why was she the only one who had to swallow salt? Who had to find some way to live on it?

“Shut up,” she said, feeling something splinter. She was being a bad girlfriend. Beckett was going to break up with her. She was going to lose. But the anger in her chest was like a balloon, pressing against her ribcage, squishing her organs. It needed release. She repeated it, sitting up. “Shut up.”

“I hit her, I hit her...” Beckett gasped.

“Stop crying! Why’re you crying?” she shouted, eyes wide.

Beckett ignored her. “My dad’s going to be so angry—I’ve never done anything this bad! I’m going to Hell, I’m going to Hell, I’m going to Hell—” Beckett groaned miserably as May climbed on top of him so she could see his face. She raised her hand to slap him but slammed her fists into his chest instead, then his shoulders, then his hands as he raised them to push her, and then they were wrestling in the grass—both shouting and screaming at each other to stop, and then Beckett was straddling May and they both realized she was crying.

“Why can’t I ever do it right?” she wailed, tears running hot down her cheeks and voice warbling as snot ran down her upper lip. As she spoke she tasted it on her tongue. “Why’d I have t’be born so ugly? Why’m I so mad all the time? I don’t wanna be so mad, I wanna be funny and pretty and—and—but you—I don’ even know why I asked you t’go out with me. ‘M sorry, I don’t think I like you the way Hailey does.”

Beckett was silent as May cried. She felt the ugliest she’d ever been. Coughing and choking and weak. Her mouth was dry except for her natural salt. Her eyes hurt.

“Then why did you ask me?” Beckett’s voice was soft.

“Because I wanted you to say yes,” she admitted. “I don’t know, I wanted to win.”

Beckett was silent for a moment before getting off May and pulling her up so she was sitting. He hugged her against his chest and placed a hand on the back of her head. He didn’t say a word, just held her to him until her body stopped shaking and she began to wipe her face with the skirt of her dress.

“I don’t like you the way Hailey likes me either,” Beckett said and May’s heart sank even as her shoulders relaxed in relief.

“Then why’d you say yes?” she asked, voice fried from crying.

Beckett shrugged. “I didn’t want you to be sad.”

May punched him in the shoulder. “That’s the dumbest thing I ever heard.”

“You’re the dumbest thing I ever heard,” Beckett said, pushing her back into the grass. May laid there, motionless. “...I think you’re plenty prettier than Hailey,” he said, frightened by her stillness.

“You’re just saying that so I don’t feel sad,” May accused.

"You're already sad," he pointed out. "You look weird with your hair straight. You..." He took a breath, playing with a blade of grass. "I don't eat the pretzels the lunch lady gives me 'cause when I give them to you your eyes light up like it's the best thing you ever got and it feels...like I got something too?" He looked over at May, who was looking at him now, and felt himself blush. "I like you a whole lot, May, but I don't know. I don't know why, but I can't say it when we're dating or whatever. But if we're friends, I could tell you every day if you wanted. If it would make you happy, I mean."

Beckett grunted as May's leg flew up and connected weakly to his side before sliding down into his lap. He unbuckled her Mary Jane. Minutes passed quietly with only the soft sound of grass sliding against itself and the calling of far off birds to keep them from silence.

"May?" Beckett asked softly, having placed her shoe next to him. "Are we still friends?"

May snickered, sitting up in one wild motion, which startled Beckett into shooting his arm out defensively. "Of course we're still friends." Her skin looked like it gleamed with the sun. "You were all sappy just now...and you slapped Hailey for me!"

Beckett groaned at the reminder, covering his face. "I'm going to Hell," he repeated resolutely. May laughed in the sharp way she did and pulled his hands away from his face to grin at him.

"If you're going to Hell, I'll go with you," she said, holding out her pinkie.

Beckett looked at May and couldn't imagine losing her. Couldn't imagine running someplace without her on his heels, grabbing at his shirt and cackling. A thought passed unacknowledged through his mind: If May's not in Heaven, is it Heaven? He hooked his finger around hers.

The walk to Beckett's house was leisurely. May held her shoes loosely in one hand as Beckett walked beside her and sang, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the lord," having to stop for air after every other sentence. May closed her eyes, lazily harmonizing with his cries of glory, glory, hallelujah.

Beckett opened the front door and May led him upstairs to his room, stepping over discarded toys and book bags and pieces of paper that'd been abandoned in the halls and stairwell. His room was cramped. He shared it with his brothers; three singular iron-frame beds were arranged in an open square by the window and the space between all of them was littered with clothing, bent books, and candy wrappers.

May climbed onto Beckett's bed, the one right against the wide bay window, and lay down. Beckett nudged her so that she was half on the sill and she looked down at the dead grass that surrounded the house, trying to imagine waking up to it every day.

"I've never heard the house so quiet," Beckett said, kicking off his shoes and lying down beside her. They used to nap together often before Beckett's father caught them once. Beckett had stopped wanting to after that, but there was no one around now; his family stayed at church until sundown and they'd be up well before then.

"Everyone's going to hate you on Monday," May said, yawning.

"I don't care," Beckett said, voice already dropping off with sleep.

"You should. Hailey's going to get her goons to come after you," she teased, smiling at the ceiling. Beckett's head was on her shoulder and she could feel how smooth his hair was. She missed her old hair. She wondered if Hailey had cried like she had and her smile stretched into a grin.

"I don't care," Beckett repeated. The lazy argument continued, May dreaming up methods of torture that he might be put through and Beckett reaffirming his lack of concern. It was as familiar and warm as the sun. They were both lulled by it and by the time May asked why he didn't care they were both more than half asleep, the room coated in a spectacular yellow that made it seem unreal.

"I don't care who hates me as long as you don't," he said, more sound than words, as he fell asleep on May's shoulder.

Their bodies were safely tangled together, melting with the heat on top of unmade bed sheets, and May felt her chest swell with a joy she hadn't known before. As she lay in bed with Beckett, both of them bonetired and soaked in sunlight, she felt as if they had always been and would always be together. That they would never stop choosing each other.

A hot tear rolled down her cheek as she curled herself towards his sleeping body, her own shaking with silent laughter.

They can't take this away she thought, and then fell asleep, skin aglow with sunlight and soft. The kind of soft that came with care, with milk-laden love.